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Statement submitted by International Union of Local Authorities, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Local Government Statement to Beijing+10

Women in local decision-making: leading global change

This statement is based on the inputs of mayors and councilors across the world gathered by *United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)*[1], the global local government organization.

Summary of Key Issues

In many countries local authorities are major employers through their responsibilities in public schools, hospitals, environment and transport. Local authorities have the capacity to create services such as day-care facilities. They also have responsibilities for basic education, basic health care and crucial services such as public transportation, drinking water, sanitation and the planning of cities where women and girls live. Even when local governments are not directly responsible for these services, it is to their local governments that citizens turn. It is therefore impossible to imagine the advancement of women without the deep involvement and commitment of local governments.

Yet the significant impact that local authorities have on the lives of women is not sufficiently recognized in the Beijing Platform for Action. Local governments have nevertheless made significant progress over the past ten years in developing a *local government platform for action,* the local version of the UN equality agenda.

The role of local government in facilitating the local realization of the Platform for Action is critical because:

1. Communities where all citizens are empowered to participate in social, economic and political opportunities are instrumental in the eradication of poverty. **Inclusive local governments** are crucial to achieving the kind of governance systems necessary to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

2. Although only two of the eight **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** explicitly mention women, it is clear that every goal has a direct impact on the lives of women. Poverty has a female face, as does HIV, childcare and education. Local governments are responsible for providing services in each of those fields and need support and recognition as leaders for global change. By working on the advancement of women we are not only improving the living conditions of this group but making full use of the positive potential for change for half of the world's population, for the benefit of all men and women.

[1] *United Cities and Local Governments* is the worldwide advocate of all local governments, big and small: cities, towns and their associations. Gathering contributions of 1000 leading cities around the world and practically all the existing associations in the globe, it is a membership based organization that represents the political representatives of some three billion citizens worldwide, from 112 countries around the globe. For more information, visit www.cities-localgovernments.org.

3. The demonstrated capacity of women to take care of their families and communities needs to be translated **into political participation** if true change is to be achieved. The promotion of women's participation in local decision-making should play a pivotal role in the global strategy for the next ten years.

Actions undertaken by local authorities and their associations: *Local Government Platform for Action*

1. Local Governments have direct responsibility in the majority of the 12 areas of concern identified in the Platform for Action:

   Poverty: The lack of drinking water, electricity or sanitation infrastructures are expressions of poverty and are areas where local governments have a direct responsibility. Urban planning and slum upgrading have direct impact on the living conditions of women, who form the majority of the poor.

   Education and training: The lack of proper resources to invest in schools and ensure the schooling of girls determines the disadvantaged position of the women of the future.

   Health: Water points in slum areas, public toilets and even family hospitals are the responsibility of local governments without resources in poor countries. Investing in the capacity of local government to provide universal basic services is investing in healthier women and families.

   Violence: Local governments have vast experience in developing services for the protection of women such as municipal centers for women victims of domestic violence. Millions of women around the world have started a better life with their children with the support of these centers, which offer them refuge until they can support themselves.

   Economy: The promotion of private-public partnerships and creating an adequate environment for development, for example through City Development Strategies, are important local government responsibilities which influence the opportunities of women and communities.

   Human rights and avoiding discrimination: Inclusive governance structures can promote respect for human rights and facilitate the kind of positive social change necessary to support the advancement of women. For instance, local legal frameworks and municipal policies have provided encouraging reports of increased employment opportunities and more equal conditions.

2. In 2000, Local Governments expressed their concern before the United Nations General Assembly about the lack of reference to local governments' role in the *Platform for Action*. Since 2000 local governments from more than 112 countries, gathered in ***UCLG,*** have been working to achieve the equality objectives of the Platform in all the fields mentioned above.

3. Local Governments and their Associations have dedicated their own human and financial resources and have often taken the lead in developing innovative strategies for women's advancement. The establishment of broader partnerships with international institutions and grass-roots women organizations has played an important role in our work over the past 5 years.

4. A core focus has been Objective G1: **Ensuring women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making**; and Objective G2: **Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership**. The equal representation of women and men in elected posts is a priority objective, because of the impact this has on other spheres of activity. Increased participation of women in political life contributes to women friendly services, greater employment of women and policy development based on the specific needs of women and girls.

5. In all countries of the world, women are still under-represented in elected positions. However, contrary to stagnation at the national level[2], the numbers of women in decision-making positions at the local level are gradually increasing, often thanks to the introduction of quota systems, as in the new democracies in Africa, and to increased decentralization, particularly in Latin America. It is notable that the percentage of women councilors is higher in almost all countries around the world than the percentage of women parliamentarians.

6. Experience in local politics gives women unique and important opportunities to develop their capacities and the necessary support for office in other spheres of government. Further, more women in decision-making provides new approaches that benefit the general advancement of women and promotes the changes in mentality that are crucial for the future.

7. Since Beijing+5 in 2000, local governments have come together to form a new world organization, ***UCLG***, which has gender equality as a core policy objective. Building on the broad experience of its founding organizations, UCLG received at its Founding Congress a democratic mandate to promote the role of women in local government.

8. In 2002 the world association of local governments, supported by the Netherlands Foreign Affairs Ministry, started the implementation of a ***Global Programme for the Promotion of the Participation of Women in Local Decision-Making***. This unique programme is designed and implemented by Local Government Associations (LGAs) at global, regional and national levels. The recipients are both women politicians and local governments that want to increase their capacity to promote gender equality.

9. Through ***UCLG,*** Local Government Associations have developed a mapping mechanism to collect data on the status of women in local decision-making. A global database with an overview of the percentages of women elected officials has been set up and is being updated regularly. The data collected allows us to conclude that the participation of women in local politics is increasing and surpasses the percentages of participation in national politics at parliamentary level. It also shows that the gap between developed and developing countries is closing, with developed countries in southern Europe, where participation is decreasing marginally, showing lower women participation than countries in Latin America and Africa. The application of quotas is highlighted as a key instrument.

10. Another key objective is supporting the establishment of national, regional and global networks of elected women representatives. This responds to the Beijing+5 recommendation to build and strengthen solidarity among women. These support networks facilitate exchange but also provide brainstorming mechanisms to promote change and innovation. Interregional exchange has led to the replication of mechanisms, such as quota systems, that have proven successful around the world. Elected women networks are important tools not only in

[2] See www.cities-localgovernments.org

ensuring continuity in political participation but also in promoting the development of gender-sensitive policies.

11. Advancement mechanisms need to be applied in political parties to ensure an increase in the number of women candidates for eligible positions but also to create changes to political cultures that make it difficult for women to participate in politics, such as meeting at late hours and lack of funding. Local elected women networks supported by the associations of local authorities, have promoted the creation of women caucuses within their respective political parties to lobby for the inclusion of advancement mechanisms.

12. Local governments have actively promoted public debate on the role of municipalities in local equality through promoting the Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government which has been ratified by 94 local government organizations from 24 different countries.

13. ***UCLG*** and its members have developed international communication tools on the importance of gender equality for the development of democracy. LGAs have raised awareness of the specific needs of women by organizing and supporting thematic seminars and conferences around the world.

14. Over the past five years LGAs around the globe have developed strategic plans for gender advancement and support mechanisms for women elected representatives, such as training courses and mentoring systems.

Lessons learned and future action of UCLG and its membership

15. Awareness-raising campaigns need to be more targeted to men, boys and girls if the necessary social change is to be achieved.

16. *"Local government is in a unique position to contribute to the global struggle for gender equality...The systematic integration of women augments the democratic basis, the efficiency and the quality of the activities of local government."*[3]

17. Improved local governance, efficient decentralization and strong democratic local governments are crucial to gender advancement and to equality.

18. Although only two of the eight MDGs are directly linked with women advancement, all of them have a direct impact on the lives of women. Women are consequently key actors for the achievement of these goals. The role of women in the advancement of communities, which is broadly recognized by practitioners working in the field, is not sufficiently reflected in international and national policies.

19. Equally, the acknowledgement of the experience of local government in development needs to be reflected in international declarations such as those on the MDGs.

20. It is not only necessary to develop mechanisms to get women into political office, but also to develop tools to ensure these mechanisms are well utilized, and to support women once they are elected. Women politicians often disappoint their female constituency, partially due to

[3] Paragraphs 10 and 11, IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, 1998.

lack of information between the two groups which could be overcome with the establishment of regular meetings.

21. Strong partnerships between grass-roots women and LGAs is essential to increase participation in politics but also to support elected women while in office and to ensure gender-sensitive policies.

Local Government commitments before the international community

On behalf of hundreds of thousands of local authorities and their national associations worldwide, ***UCLG*** commits itself to appeal for:

22. Local democratic processes that recognize social inclusion and citizens' rights to basic services to be acknowledged as crucial to improving the quality of life of women, and local governments that develop gender-friendly policies to be supported by international agencies.

23. Support from international and national development agencies for local processes assessing the needs of women.

24. The need to keep gender policies as a priority on the international agenda, to ensure gender issues are not relegated to mainstreaming and to develop a critical mass to support research into innovative mechanisms for women advancement.

25. Support from national and international agencies for partnerships between local authorities and women groups.

26. Finally, local governments express their deep concern for the low profile given to the Beijing +10 process, and request that national governments put the Women Empowerment Agenda at the top of international policy development.